



The **Paradox** *of* **Maturity**

FEIKOAB PARIMAH

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Publisher:

Living Scroll Publications

P. O. Box WY 423, Kwabenya, Accra-Ghana

Cover design by:

Akrofi Sanakey

Typeset:

Adzimah Adelaide

Contact the author via: feikoabparimah@yahoo.com

DEDICATION

I respectfully dedicate this book to Brother Gbile Akanni of
Living Seed, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

What are the indelible marks of those who have been weaned from milk and are now enrolled in the school of Christian maturity? Are they not disciples who have chosen to feed on the meat of God's word and have pledged allegiance to Christ by embracing His manner of life?

All things been equal, as a man begins to age in this terrestrial sphere, his body begins to grow weaker and weaker till he is at the mercy of even children. As a child of God begins to take some lessons in maturity and makes progress, s/he begins to relinquish some of his privileges to the end that such acts will amount to disinterested benevolence. Christ's life clearly epitomizes this truth. Though He was the son of God, He chose to relinquish most of His rights just for the good of humanity. At His arrest He could have commanded angels to fight for Him but chose not to.

The apostles were persecuted and despitefully used though they were filled with the spirit of God. The more the power of God rests upon a man, the more he becomes a servant. Paul and the other disciples were seen as the scum of the earth, but the earth was not worthy of them. They might have been poor, but possessed riches. For Paul, he gloried in his weakness knowing that the glory of God was displayed in it. Greatness is what God defines it to be, and it appears through the pages of scripture that

God's standards are diametrically opposed to that of the world. John was great in the sight of God, but probably will not, per the assessment of the average believer pass for a man of God. If you choose to mature in Christ, your life will certainly contradict carnal standards.

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CHAPTER 1

BE A TRUE WORSHIPER

Probably, if there is a need God has in this hour, it should be for those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. This is so because scripture makes us recognize that, God is seeking such people to worship Him;

*“But the hour comes, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for **the Father seeks such** to be his worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” John 4:23-24.*

God is not just interested in people gathering and observing certain liturgies and claiming they are worshiping Him. If our worship is to be acceptable in the site of God, then it must be motivated by the right kind of spirit and in line with rightly

dividing the word of truth. This is why it is always important that our minds be renewed in order for us to be able to prove what is acceptable in the sight of God;

“Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what is the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God.” Rom 12:2

It is possible for us to claim, we are serving God acceptably whereas He doesn't see it to be so. This is why this chapter is being written to help us assess our level of love and commitment to Him (which proves whether we are His true disciples or not). You will notice, I qualified the word disciple with true. This suggests, is not just enough to claim to be a disciple of Christ, but that we should be His true disciples. When one studies the gospels very well, he will come to the conclusion that not all who were disciples of Christ were truly His. Though Judas Iscariot was among the twelve, yet he was not a true disciple of Christ. In the end he betrayed the savior and eventually hanged himself. Though Christ Himself chose him, He testified against him that he was of the devil;

“Jesus answered them, “Didn't I choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil? Now he spoke of Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, for it was he who would betray him, being one of the twelve.” John 6:70-71

Apart from the twelve disciples of Christ, there were other disciples who made up the seventy (70) and others who were not actually numbered. However, as we progress in our study of the scriptures we get to realize, there came a time when most of His disciples left following Him after He revealed an important truth to them;

"He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me, and I in him...These things he said in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum. Therefore many of his disciples, when they heard this, said, "This is a hard saying! Who can listen to it?... But there are some of you who don't believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who didn't believe, and who it was who would betray him...At this, many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." John 6:56-66.

This scenario informs us that it is not all who claim to be disciples of Christ who are really true. Let us go through some scriptures to establish this truth and to know how true Disciples of Christ really look like.

From Christ's own teachings (including the one concerning the vine and the branches), He makes us know, one can only be termed a true disciple (John 8:31) of His if the fellow remains in His word and bears much fruit;

“Jesus therefore said to those Jews who had believed him, “If you remain in my word, then you are truly my disciples... In this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit; and so you will be my disciples”
John 8:31,15:8.

According to these scriptures, when one starts to follow Him (connected to Him) and bears fruit, He prunes the fellow in order that he or she can bear much fruit afterwards. Thus, we can infer that bearing fruit is a pre-requisite to bearing much fruit. Discipleship (true discipleship) is not just for starters but for those who continue in Him. The reason why most men and women do not bear much fruit these days is simply because they have being disconnected from the true vine. Otherwise they should have being growing more and more into the likeness of Christ. It appears most of the disciples of Christ these days are more inclined towards the world than Christ. If not, there should have been clear distinctions between them and the people of the world when it comes to character manifestation (the fruit of the spirit). We should never use material prosperity as a mark of a true disciple of Christ. Christ Himself made it crystal clear that a man's life does not consist in the abundance of things he or she possesses (Luke 12:15). If we use material gains as a proof of true discipleship, then most of the godly men in the Bible as well as in history never qualify to be such. You and I will however testify, this is not the case, as their life of devotion to Christ can never be questioned.

Our level of spiritual productivity is directly proportional to the amount of the world we lose from our lives. As we remain connected to Christ, He prunes as of certain attachments from the world like sin and weights which tend to weigh us down;

“Every branch in me that doesn't bear fruit, he takes away. Every branch that bears fruit, he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already pruned clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.”
John 15:2-3

When it comes to bearing much fruit in the sight of God, never be deceived by the crowd you see. If we do, and use the crowd as a yardstick of spiritual productivity, we could be mistaking, as Christ Himself will not match up to this standard. Though in Christ's ministry a lot of people followed Him, He was never fooled by the numbers who chased Him around. Most of them according to His discernment were following Him because of material gains;

“When they found him on the other side of the sea, they asked him, “Rabbi, when did you come here? Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly I tell you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves, and were filled.” John 6:25-26.

Those who come to Christ because of material prosperity are not His true disciples. In the end you will realize the number of His

disciples who were shortlisted and waited for Him in the upper room were about one twenty (120). You can strike out the percentage of disciples as against the multitudes who patronized His ministry. By this I am not implying that, numbers do not matter to God, but that it should not be a yardstick for God's approval. It is the quality of life which God looks at, to either approve or disapprove a man.

Now a lot of people are preaching and teaching the Bible in Christ's name and are definitely achieving some results. These results will never pass for anything in the sight of Christ (in the end) if our fruit of the spirit is questionable. This is why He will tell some people that, He never knew them, for they were workers of iniquity;

“He will say, 'I tell you, I don't know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity.'”
Luke 13:27.

From this scripture doesn't it appear they achieved a lot of results even in the name of Christ? If we are to use such results as fruits in ministry, then we could be mistaking massively. Most of these results are largely attributable to the manifestation of spiritual gifts (on the part of true men of God) or familiar spirits (on the part of false prophets and teachers). Shouldn't it interest us to know, Christ never said we are to be known by our gifts but rather by the kind of fruit we bear?;

“By their fruits you will know them. Do you gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles?...Therefore, by their fruits you will know them.” Matt 7:16-20

Spiritual gifts do not necessarily help us manifest the fruit of the spirit, but the fruit of the spirit helps us manifest the gifts of the spirit in the right direction, (well pleasing in the sight of God). God wants us to manifest the fruit of the spirit and in turn produce men and women who will also manifest likewise in that order. Mind you, this process takes time and we need to be patient in it. Spiritual gifts are however, also important in helping us fulfill our mission here on earth or else there wouldn't have been the need for God to give them to us anyway. He rather places premium on the fruit we bear which makes us grow into His very image. That is why He commands us to mature;

“Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” Matt 5:48

Haven said earlier on that we should not be fooled by the crowd and that it is not necessarily the mark of God's approval, let us go on to establish God's vision for the entire human race and the part we are supposed to play in its realization. It is never the desire of God that anyone should perish, but that we all come to the knowledge of the saving grace of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ;

“The Lord is not slow concerning his promise, as some count slowness; but is patient with us, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” 2 Peter 3:9.

If possible, He would have wished that all mankind all over the world obey the gospel. This is why we need to spread the gospel to the ends of the world. This universal agenda of God is understood perfectly through the parables Christ gave in connection with the kingdom of God;

*“He spoke another parable to them. The Kingdom of Heaven is like yeast, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, until it was all leavened.”
Matt 13:33.*

In this parable concerning leaven, He makes us know, just as a small leaven is able to leaven a whole dough, so also it is His desire that the message of the kingdom of God spreads and affect every part of the world and they that inhabit it.

Considering the example of the mustard seed (which is the smallest of seeds) He taught that the kingdom of God could be likened unto it. The kingdom may have started small, but will never end small. It will grow and be of tremendous benefit to multitudes of people. Not forgetting the glory of the later house will supersede that of the former.

To make this vision of God become a reality, we have our part to play. We should not keep on postponing our responsibility in winning the lost when it is in our power to do so now. That is why the preacher admonishes us to remember our greater in the days of our youth before the time comes when we will be naturally indisposed to doing so;

“Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, Before the evil days come, and the years draw near, When you will say, “I have no pleasure in them;” Eccl 12:1

There are times we feel inadequate to begin witnessing Christ to people. The enemy sometimes deceives us that we can do it another time making as forget that time and tide waits for no man. Christ in His days amplified this truth and the facts of its urgency when He said, He must do the work of the father whiles it is yet day, for the time was coming when circumstances would not permit Him to do so;

*“I must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day. The night is coming, when no one can work.”
John 9:4*

Paul advised Timothy to give himself wholly to the preaching and teaching of the truth in order for his profiting (in other words progress, prosperity or fruitfulness) to be made evident to all.

Let us bear in mind that Timothy was just a youth, but responsibility was placed on him to set an example for others to emulate;

“Let no man despise your youth; but be an example to those who believe, in word, in your way of life, in love, in spirit, in faith, and in purity.” 1 Tim 4:12.

You would realize from this scripture that Paul hypes the importance of certain virtues which he is supposed to uphold, for that others to learn from. It is the quality of our life and sacrifices which do matter a lot in the sight of God and not just the results of our labours in themselves.

In the days of Cain and Abel, God placed premium on the quality of sacrifices they brought before Him. The sacrifice of Abel was received by God due to the quality of life of Abel and that of his sacrifice. Cain's own was however rejected because, in the first place God did not accept his lifestyle and consequently the quality of his sacrifice;

“If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.” Gen 4:7 KJV.

This tells us that, for God to accept our work or the results of our labour, we should first of all be pleasing to Him by the lifestyle we

live. We are being commanded by God to love Him with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our strength. He is indeed searching for those whose hearts are committed unto Him so that He will show Himself strong on their behalf;

“For the eyes of Yahweh run back and forth throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. Herein you have done foolishly; for from henceforth you shall have wars.” 2 Chron 16:9.

May the prayer of Paul for the church in Thessalonica be our portion, so that our hearts will be directed into the love of Him;

“May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patience of Christ.” 2 Thess 3:5.

In the next chapter, I will endeavor to expatiate on the value and necessity for loving the Lord with our all along these lines. One very important commandment we ought to obey as believers is, we need to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our understanding, with all our soul and with all our might;

“you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” This is the first commandment.” Mark 12:30

After we become believers, scripture enjoins us to live for the one who died for us (Christ) and not to live for ourselves. Our totality is to be yielded to Christ as we submit the members of our body to Him as instruments of righteousness;

“Neither present your members to sin as instruments of unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God, as alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.” Rom 6:13.

When we were in the world, our minds were alienated from the Lord;

“You, being in past times alienated and enemies in your mind in your evil works,” Col 1:21.

Thus, our thoughts and imaginations were set at variance with the principles and will of God for us. This is why when we become believers, there is the immediate need for us to be transformed by the renewing of our mind;

“Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what is the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God.” Rom 12:2

Our hearts are also supposed to be completely yielded to God, as that is where He wills to operate from. It is therefore important we

keep our hearts and minds by the peace of God; *“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.”* Phil 4:7. Above all we must allow this peace to rule our hearts.

Before one can love the Lord with all of His heart, he or she must first of all meet or fulfill certain conditions. The condition is, we must first and foremost hate the world. Scripture states that we should not love the world, neither the things that are there in. For if one loves the world, then clearly the love of the father is not in him or her;

“Don't love the world, neither the things that are in the world. If anyone loves the world, the Father's love isn't in him.” 1 John 2:15.

If therefore one loves the world, then how can he love God at the same time, not to even talk of loving Him with all his heart. We should therefore bear in mind that, before we can start loving the Lord with all our heart, our hearts must first of all be devoid of the love of the world and the things that are therein. I see this to be the very foundation upon which we can start loving the Lord with all our heart.

CHAPTER 2

UNDERSTAND THE VALUE OF SMALLNESS

In our previous chapter we looked at how the kingdom of God starts from little to much through the parables (leaven and mustard seed) Jesus gave concerning the kingdom of God. We also looked at the role we are also expected to play in the fulfillment of the saving agenda of God for all of humanity. In this chapter I will proceed along that line by showing how individuals can do much for the kingdom of God. From Jesus' parables we learned that God does not always start with a lot, but with a little He affects the lot.

Right from creation, God could have decided to create a lot of human beings to fill the whole earth. Instead He decided to create only one man from whom all others eventually emerged. He created man

(Adam) from whom Eve resulted and consequently the entire human race.

When God wanted to save the then world, He chose only one man in the person of Noah to build an ark for the salvation of man and animals. Abraham in His generation was also hand-picked by God in order to establish a covenant with him and his descendants as well as the entire human race. Further, in the delivering of the children of Israel from their oppressors, He normally raised individuals as judges who delivered Israel from their enemies. In all these instances, God could have raised a lot of people at once, but chose otherwise. I believe one of the reasons why He normally chose this option was to underscore the value and importance of a single soul. Christ in His teachings attested to this truth by saying that, the whole world and all its constituents can never be equated to a single soul;

“For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? For what will a man give in exchange for his life?” Mark 8:36-37.

When a single soul is saved, there is rejoicing in heaven by the angels of God. This informs us of the level of God’s love for us as individuals and what we are capable of doing for the advancement of the course of heaven. Scripture makes us understand that one sinner is capable of destroying much good;

“Wisdom is better than weapons of war; but one sinner destroys much good.” Eccl 9:18. If one is therefore able to save someone from error, he would have succeeded in covering a multitude of Sins;

“let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins.” James 5:20

Just as Adam disobeyed God and sin entered into this world with its attendant consequences, the last Adam in the person of Christ also made salvation available to all by doing the will of the father through the instrumentality of His death on the cross.

In Christ's life time, He made only few disciples who in turn affected their generation on a massive scale. History will also bear witness that apart from these men mentioned in the Bible, there have arisen men who impacted their generations mightily. Though Christ died alone, yet He has reconciled all of us to God;

“But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation” 2 Cor 5:18.

Before His death on the cross, He made a profound statement to the intent that except a grain (not grains) of corn falls to the ground and dies, it abides alone. But when it dies it later on grows

and brings forth much fruit (John 12:24).

Samson in the Old Testament (as a judge in his generation) once killed over thousand people with the jawbone of an ass single handedly. Later in his death he was able to kill almost the whole of his enemies alone (Judg 16:30). We can not afford to forget the example of Paul who did a lot for the kingdom of God, such that even his bonds led to the furtherance of the gospel (Phil 1:12).

CHAPTER 3

KNOW AND UNDERSTAND WHAT PRECEDES GLORY

The glory of God as desirable as it is, never manifest in a vacuum. It is normally preceded by seemingly gloomy circumstances. When the Israelites were in Egypt and God sent deliverance by the reason of their cry, (being precipitated by their persecution), God showed forth His power and glory when they were being oppressed. If not for the oppression of the king, how would there have been the knowledge of the plaques? Remember Paul reveals to us that God raised Pharoah and hardened his heart in order to show forth His glory;

"For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I caused you to be raised up, that I might show in you my power, and that my name might be published abroad in all the earth." Rom 9:17

When they left Egypt and came face to face with the red sea, which looked like a dead end to their emancipation, God showed up by parting the red sea into two (making them walk on dry grounds). Also, in the wilderness the provision of water and food for them were all preceded by pictures of gloom.

In the New Testament, the first miracle Christ performed was at a marriage feast where the wine that was being served had finished. It was in such a situation that Christ turned water into wine. Scripture says it was the first miracle He performed to show forth His Glory;

“This beginning of his signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.” John 2:11.

The manifestation of the glory of God in this scenario was also predicated on a situation which seemed to have been out of control.

Its however important for us to realize that, when it comes to even our future glorification and ascension into heaven, scripture states plainly that, if we do not suffer with Christ then there is no way we can be glorified together with Him;

“and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if indeed we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified with him.” Rom 8:17.

Suffering for Christ's sake is therefore a pre-requisite for the manifestation of the glory of God. No wonder God showed forth His glory through the life and ministry of Paul simply due to the fact that He also suffered much for the sake of the gospel of Christ.

When Peter and James were thrown into prison, the angel of God surfaced in answer to the prayers of the saints by physically delivering them from the prison. Subsequently, when Paul and Silas were also imprisoned, the prison gates shook and the glory of God was manifested right in the prison such that the jailor and his family were all eventually saved.

Stephen had the opportunity of seeing the heavens opened, with Christ standing at the right hand of the father (in His glorified state) when he was being stoned. In all these few scenarios, the glory of God was made manifest in situations we could term as been gloomy.

“Arise, shine; for your light is come, and the glory of Yahweh is risen on you. For, behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the peoples; but Yahweh will arise on you, and his glory shall be seen on you.” Isaiah 60:1-2.

In Isaiah's prophecy, you will realize the opportune time for us to a rise and shine is when gross darkness has covered the people. When there is thick darkness, the little light you introduce is

capable of making tremendous impact. If we are faced with any situation which seems to be gloomy, let us remember it is just a raw material for the manifestation of the glory of God. Never be discouraged nor be in despair as Christ is capable of turning such situations around for our good and to His own glory. Thus, in all things we should give thanks to the almighty God (1 Thess 5:18).

Before Christ finally appears, let me remind us that, the people of God (the Israelites) will be under severe attack from the nations of the world. Nevertheless, in such a time God will send forth His two witnesses who will display the power and glory of God to a certain magnitude. It is after the troubles the Israelites will go through that Christ will suddenly appear in the air with glory and avenge His people of their adversaries.

Brethren, we need not freight whenever we are faced with situations which look gloomy. For all you know, the manifestation of the glory of God is just at the end of the tunnel. Be of good cheer as Christ said, He had overcome, making you and I more than conquerors;

“I have told you these things, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have oppression; but cheer up! I have overcome the world.” John 16:33

CHAPTER 4

ABANDONE YOURSELF TO PRAYER AND THE WORD

Everyone who goes into a business venture does so with the hope of maximizing profit at the end of the day. God in a way also seeks to profit from whatever investment He makes in our lives and that is why in the end He will require us to render accounts unto Him.

Christ at a very tender age knew what He was about and dedicated His life to the pursuit of His father's business;

*"He said to them, "Why were you looking for me?
Didn't you know that I must be in my Father's
house?" Luke 2:49.*

The question then is, what is the father's business? From the example of Christ we will gather that He was found in the temple with the doctors of the law studying and also sharing what He

had. Not only was He there for these two reasons, but also for the purpose of prayer. For it is written, the house of God shall be a place of prayer for all nations. We can therefore infer that to be engaged in the fathers business, we have to give ourselves to the study of His word, pray and share what we have received of His word with others. There is no way one can claim to be serving or engaged in the Lord's business whereas he does not know the Lord. Christ was once asked how one could work the works of God? The answer given by Him is revealing in that, working the works of God entails knowing God and Christ whom He has sent;

"They said therefore to him, "What must we do, that we may work the works of God? Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." John 6:28-29

The Apostles understood this truth and thus why they always gave themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word;

"But we will continue steadfastly in prayer and in the ministry of the word." Acts 6:4

For us to be able to do the father's business, we must spend time with the Lord in prayer in order for His nature to be expressed in us. We are to also study and share His word with the lost. No wonder Paul was a man given to much study of the word and prayer. At one time he was accused of too much learning;

“As he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, “Paul, you are crazy! Your great learning is driving you insane! But he said, “I am not crazy, most excellent Festus, but boldly declare words of truth and reasonableness.” Acts 26:24-25.

At another time he himself claimed he prayed in tongues more than the believers in Corinth. We gather that he was a man of prayer when we study closely the introduction to some of his letters. In most of his introductions, he informs the believers of how much he loves them and the prayers he always (night and day) offers on their behalf.

In his letter to Timothy he advised him to study in order to show himself approved unto God by rightly dividing the truth;

“Give diligence to present yourself approved by God, a workman who doesn't need to be ashamed, properly handling the Word of Truth.” 2 Tim 2:15.

So, before we can be approved by God as His ministers, we must give ourselves to the acquisition of the knowledge of God or else He will reject us as His priest. This is known through the prophecy of Hosea to the house of Israel;

“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I will also reject you, That you may be no priest to me. Because

*you have forgotten your God's law, I will also forget
your children.” Hos 4:6*

In business circles, is being said that time is money. This I believe is to show the importance of time and the need to redeem it wisely. For us to be able to bring maximum profit into our father's business, we need to also redeem the times in which we live in as Satan is poised to waist our time by making us concentrate on the non-essentials of this life.

CHAPTER 5

DON'T PLATEAU IN YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF HIS SUFFERINGS

In chapter three, we looked at how gloomy situations are turned into the glory of God. In this chapter I will endeavor to first of all touch on how pleased God is when we suffer for His sake and later look at the need to appropriate the resurrection power of the Lord.

Before Israel went into Egypt, prophecy had already gone ahead of them to the effect that they were to suffer in that land;

"He said to Abram, "Know for sure that your seed will live as foreigners in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them. They will afflict them four hundred years." Gen 15:13.

Though in the first place they had not rebelled against God whatsoever, yet God had predetermined that they suffer in the

land of Egypt. Brethren, let us not be deceived into thinking that, when one is suffering or we are suffering for the sake of Christ then is due to our sins. It could be that, God wants to reveal His glory afterwards.

Bible makes us know, it pleased God (He was happy) to bruise our savior;

"Yet it pleased Yahweh to bruise him; he has put him to grief: when you shall make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of Yahweh shall prosper in his hand." Isa 53:10.

Christ never displeased the father in any respect, but rather suffered in the hands of sinners. When He was travelling in Gethsemane, He allowed the will of the father to prevail in His life. Passing through one suffering or the other in accordance with the will of God should rather gladden our hearts, knowing it will lead to the good of many. Before the Apostles even obeyed the commission of Christ, they were already informed of the need for them to suffer for His sake. Contrary to their human inclinations, they were to rejoice rather than been sad (Luke 6:22-23). The life and call of Paul testifies to this truth that there are certain sufferings which are predetermined for our lives. We later come to the realization of the need to suffer certain things for His sake when we recount the benefits it had accrued to the profit of the

kingdom of God. Paul was informed of the great things he was to suffer for the sake of Christ;

“For I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake.” Acts 9:16.

In his later life we all read of how he suffered persecutions, imprisonments and so on. for the sake of his savior. His imprisonments for example, (we are told) abounded to the furtherance of the gospel in his letter to the church in Philippi (Phil 1:12).

One of the greatest intercessors we could find in the New Testament dispensation was Epaphras. Though he found himself in prison (seemingly unpleasant situation) yet he did not look at his present predicament, but rather dedicated his life to praying and interceding for the church of Christ;

“Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, salutes you, always striving for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.” Col 4:12

Throughout Stephens's persecution, God was fully aware and watched whiles he was being stoned. It baffles many that God did not come to His aid nor did he himself ask for deliverance. From the look of things Christ was rather pleased to see him suffer for His sake. We come to understand this when Christ Himself gave

him a standing ovation prior to his departure to the Lord;

"But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"
Acts 7:55-56.

Thank God he also gladly accepted and went through such an experience for the sake of Christ. God is indeed happy for the death of His martyrs.

In the book of revelation we are made to know, there are some saints in heaven who have been crying for vengeance from the Lord. God however consoles them with the fact that He will do so, but that will be after some of their brethren who have been appointed unto such a death is fulfilled;

"They cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, Master, the holy and true, until you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth? A long white robe was given to each of them. They were told that they should rest yet for a while, until their fellow servants and their brothers, who would also be killed even as they were, should complete their course."
Rev 6:10-11.

Thus, there are some people God has already purposed, they should die for His sake, haven hitherto done no wrong. All these is for the glory of God. God is, according to scripture delighted in the death of His servants;

“Precious in the sight of Yahweh is the death of his saints.” Ps 116:15.

No matter the form their death takes, He is pleased and there after glorified. Sometimes we believe there is a particular way by which men of God should exit this earth. Thus, a man of God should may be sleep and not wake up or pass on without suffering any physical infirmity whatsoever. However, we have been given examples in scripture which informs us that, some men of faith died in an unpleasant manner (Heb 11:37).

CHAPTER 6

DESIRE TO KNOW THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION

“that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming conformed to his death; if by any means I may attain to the resurrection from the dead...”

Phil 3:10-14

One of the greatest desires of Paul was, he wanted to know the resurrection power of the Lord and to experience it in his life. By this he was not implying he was completely oblivious of the significance of the resurrection power of the Lord (or the power which rose Jesus from the grave). Rather, he yearned for a progressive knowledge and an increased experiential walk with the Him.

In some of our books I have touch on this subject matter in some sort. Nonetheless, in this book and chapter, I will go on to elaborate on this most significant aspect of our faith. Christianity is what it is simply due to the truth that Christ rose from the dead;

“If Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain; you are still in your sins. Then they also who are fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all men most pitiable.”
1 Cor 15:17-19

If Paul is talking about the need for him to know the power which rose Christ from the dead, he is actually talking about having an understanding of how God had to stretch Himself or go an extra mile to raise him from the dead. By extension how God had to go all length in order to raise us from the dead. Christ's death on the cross entailed one level of sacrifice and his resurrection from the dead also has an element of sacrifice to ensure we all possess the power of the Holy Spirit. You and I would not have experienced the power of the Holy Spirit and the indwelling presence of Christ in our lives (by faith) if not for the fact and truth that Christ rose from the dead. It is really a mystery as to how God would have to stoop so low looking at His nature, in order to dwell in us. What a level of sacrifice it is for such a pure God to live in our frail flesh. Thus why Paul prayed the following prayer in Ephesians 1:17-20;

“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of his calling, and what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to that working of the strength of his might which he worked in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places”

If the father had to stretch Himself, then there is the need that we also stretch ourselves, as we are to be imitators of God and Christ (Ephesians 5:1-2). This is why we cannot afford to be in our comfort zones. There is no child of God I have known and know who did great things for God or experienced the power and glory of God while he or she rocked him or herself in the chair of spiritual complacency and comfort. The Apostles and believers in history who achieved great feats for God did so by stretching themselves. If we desire to experience the glory and power of God to a dimension or even beyond what they experienced, then we need to also imitate them as they imitated Christ (1 Cor 4:16).

We have been commanded by God as I have already elaborated in the previous chapters to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, soul, mind and strength (Mark 12:30). God really deserves and demands our all. We are therefore expected to throw ourselves

into His service and to that of humanity just as He did. Is one thing laboring for the Lord, and another laboring abundantly (or much). Paul made this distinction when concluding his letter to the saints in Rome;

“Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, who labor in the Lord. Greet Persis, the beloved, who labored much in the Lord.” Rom 16:12.

We are to follow the example of Persis who labored abundantly in the vineyard of the Lord. They couldn't have done so if not for the fact that they chose to go the extra mile.

Those who achieve excellence in their field of endeavor are those who go the extra mile. We may be laboring at one level or the other. Nevertheless, there is the need for us to labour much. The abundant labour of those who were mentioned in the scripture was recognized and duly acknowledged by the Apostle of the Lord. Ours will certainly not go unnoticed by the lord, but will be rewarded appropriately in due time. Thus, Christ demands much fruit from His disciples.

When Christ once entered the temple and people were giving to the Lord, He noticed a widow gave her all, whereas the rich simply gave out of their abundance. Christ commended this woman for such level of selflessness;

“for all these put in gifts for God from their abundance, but she, out of her poverty, put in all that she had to live on.” Luke 21:4

At another time when Mary poured the ointment and anointed His body with it, Christ gave the charge that her deed be mentioned wherever the gospel is being preached;

*“Most assuredly I tell you, wherever this Good News is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of as a memorial of her.”
Matt 26:13.*

In this scripture (the account in Luke) Christ reveals a very profound truth. Considering the numerous sins we committed against God, He expects that with a heart of gratitude we also love Him very much. This level of love should reflect in the level of sacrifice we make for the sake of the kingdom.

Considering the life of Paul, you would realize he did a lot for the kingdom as well as suffered a lot for the same course. One who hitherto persecuted the church, making havoc of her (after encountering the truth) labored and suffered more than the other Apostles. He understood the concept that the one who is forgiven much is also expected to do much. He revealed his knowledge of this truth when he made the assertion that though he was chief of sinners Christ showed His mercy toward him as an example and a

pattern for those who will later believe;

*"The saying is faithful and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. However, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first, Jesus Christ might display all his patience, for an example of those who were going to believe in him for eternal life."
1 Tim 1:15-16.*

Consequently, this grace and mercy that was shown him by grace in his own words was not in vain, as he labored more than the other apostles;

"But by the grace of God I am what I am. His grace which was bestowed on me was not futile, but I worked more than all of them; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." 1 Cor 15:10

The labours of Paul are clearly displayed in the pages of scripture. An example of him appropriating the significance of the resurrection power in his life and ministry was when he went to Thessalonica. Over there he makes us realize that, they did not only preach the gospel to the believers there, but went the extra mile to work with their own hands in order to support themselves, as well as meet the needs of the poor believers there;

“Even so, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you, not the Good News of God only, but also our own souls, because you had become very dear to us.” 1 Thess 2:8.

Though it was their apostolic right to receive material support from the saints there, they however denied themselves of such a right because of their level of love for the saints.

The Macedonian believers also understood this truth and for that matter appropriated it in their lives. They surprised Paul and his missionary team when they begged of them to receive from their hands, their contribution for the poor saints in Jerusalem. They did this act even in the state of poverty or beyond their ability;

*“For according to their power, I testify, yes and beyond their power, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much entreaty to receive this grace and the fellowship in the service to the saints.”
2 Cor 8:3-4.*

In these verses we are being informed, they first gave themselves to the Lord and to the apostle and subsequently gave their material possessions for the benefit of other saints. They gave even beyond their ability by stretching themselves or coming out of their comfort zone. This is an act of the grace of God which Paul prayed that the church of Corinth would also possess.

In stretching ourselves, we place ourselves at the position of experiencing and manifesting the various graces made available to us by the Lord. As we continue to stretch ourselves and manifest the various graces there is in Christ Jesus, we tend to consequently grow in His likeness by progressively keying ourselves into 2Peter 1:2-9.

Even in the Old Testament God stretched the faith of Abraham by demanding that he sacrifice his only son Isaac. Abraham obeyed and in the process of doing so God provided a substitute for him;

"Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to kill his son. The angel of Yahweh called to him out of the sky, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" He said, "Here I am." He said, "Don't lay your hand on the boy, ...Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering instead of his son."
Gen 22:10-13.

This act, most theologians agree was a type of Christ. Thus, Christ was provided due to a man whose faith was stretched. The conclusion of this chapter would not be complete if the point is not made that the proclamation of eternal life and pleasures in heaven is a constituent of the resurrection power of the Lord. We preach eternal life and the gathering of all the saints unto God in heaven by the significance of Christ's resurrection. Some having an understanding of this truth never loved their lives even onto

death. Others did not also accept deliverance from their captors and persecutors since they could envisage a better resurrection (Heb 11:35).

CHAPTER 7

A GOOD CONFESSION OF YOU

“I charge you before God, who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate testified the good confession, that you keep the commandment without spot, blameless, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ;” 1 Tim 6:13-14.

As we hasten the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ by way of evangelism and personal consecration, is very important we pay heed to the above scripture. Christ witnessed a good confession before Pontius Pilate. Pilate made it known, he did not find any fault in our savior;

*“Pilate said to the chief priests and the multitudes, “I find no basis for a charge against this man.”
Luke 23:4*

Our light is supposed to be shining wherever we find ourselves. The Philippian Church was admonished by Paul to make sure they were blameless and without rebuke until the coming of our Lord Jesus. The darkness around us should be an incentive for us to shine. What testimony do people have concerning us? Believers most often than not experience ill treatment from their superiors at their places of work. In the midst of all these, we are expected to remain composed and to serve those who spitefully use us. We are not to be fighting back unnecessarily in the name of 'fighting for our rights'. Our system is heavenly and thus contradicts the way of the people of this world. Naturally, we may feel like replying whenever we are being treated in an illful manner. Scripture however instructs us to copy our Savior, who though did no wrong, was treated spitefully and manhandle by the very people He came to save (1Peter 2:13-25). Christ could have chosen to respond to all that He suffered, but rather remained mute. He could be seen as 'foolish', but that was the wisdom of God. The foolishness of God is certainly wiser than men. Anyone who wants to be wise in the sight of God is to become a fool in the eyes of the world;

“Let no one deceive himself. If anyone thinks that he is wise among you in this world, let him become a fool, that he may become wise.” 1 Cor 3:18.

Men like Daniel witnessed a good confession in their days and so should we.

CHAPTER 8

KNOW THE ILLOGICALITY OF MATURITY

Paul admonished the church of Corinth to strive for perfection. The desire of God for our spiritual walk with Him is to continually grow and mature in Him. There is no parent (earthly speaking) who will not desire that his or her child matures and even takes after him or her. It was therefore not out of place that Paul prayed that the Corinthian believers be perfected in their walk with the Lord (2corinthians 13:9). In our days it is very difficult for some to actually decipher between the matured and the babes. Most folks label people as being matured simply because of what they see, without actually matching them with God's prescribed standards of maturity as enshrined in the scriptures. One of the reasons I will attribute to this state of inversion of truth in the minds of some is, they fail to recognize that maturity is a paradox. To clarify, when someone is indeed

maturing in the lord, the fellow in the eyes of most men do not seem to be matured or spiritual whereas those who are not maturing are rather seen to be matured or spiritual.

The more one matures in the Lord, the more the fellow seem to be weak in the sight of men. Christ who is our perfect example, reveals that, though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lived by God and for that matter we who are in Him are weak but at the same time powerful in Him;

“For he was crucified through weakness, yet he lives through the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we will live with him through the power of God toward you.” 2 Cor 13:4

At His crucifixion, He could have dealt with those who manhandled Him but however refused to. The point here is, when one matures or is maturing, though he may have the power to do certain things, he however chooses not to abuse that power. The Apostle Peter teaches us that as Christ was maltreated without any justifiable base (and yet he did not reply), we as His followers are also expected to follow His example by not answering back and threatening when we are being illfully treated;

“Who did not sin, "neither was deceit found in his mouth. Who, when he was cursed, didn't curse back. When he suffered, didn't threaten, but committed himself to him who judges righteously”
1 Peter 2:22-23

Surprisingly, there are many in our days who see themselves to be so anointed that they are “untouchable”. At the least provocation, they seek solace in “touch not my anointed and do my prophets no harm” instead of enduring attacks from men. If there was anyone who was so anointed, then it is Christ Himself. He never resorted to running under cover with the pretext that He was the anointed and consequently no mortal was to lay his hand on Him. How unfortunate it is that, some at the least pressure even curse their fellow men. This is not supposed to be so, as we are instructed to bless and not to curse anyone no matter how grievous the offense may be. James makes us understand, the mouth we use in blessing God should not be used in cursing our fellow man;

*“With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who are made in the image of God. Out of the same mouth comes forth blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.”
James 3:9-10.*

Likewise, Peter adds that since we were called to be a blessing, then whatever proceeds from us should be geared towards blessing men;

“Not rendering evil for evil, or reviling for reviling; but instead blessing; knowing that to this were you called, that you may inherit a blessing.” 1 Peter 3:9

It does not mean that those who spitefully use us will not receive their due from the living God. Scripture instructs that we should even do good unto our enemies as a sign of distinction between us (believers) and the unbelieving world. This is to the intent that we will heap as it were, coals of fire on their head in the figurative sense. God will surely avenge us of our adversaries, giving meaning to His promise to us that vengeance is His, and He will surely repay; *“Don't seek revenge yourselves, beloved, but give place to God's wrath. For it is written,*

“Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the Lord.” Rom 12:19.

When we take vengeance into our own hands, we inadvertently take His position as the avenger and thus, rob Him of the right to punish all those who treat us with iron fists. Those who are maturing and thus, becoming more and more Christlike, commit themselves to the one who is capable of saving them just as Christ committed Himself to God the father. When one fights back or reply at people who spitefully use them and swear and threaten, they only reveal to the discerning believer that they are yet to be crucified with the Lord. It is through our crucifixion with the Lord that the life and power of God can be made manifest in our lives.

You will recount that in the book of Acts when the Apostles were gathered before the sanhedrin and each receiving a fair share of their suffering with Christ by the stripes they each received, none

of them did swear or even curse these blind teachers of the law. Logically, the Apostles were those who walked and ate with Christ and on top of it all were privileged to be chosen and anointed with the task of pioneering the evangelization and discipleship of the world through the preaching of the gospel. By inference, they were “more qualified” to threaten and even rain curses on these lost rabbis of Israel. They however chose not to, but remembered their saviors words that, if men did not spare Him, of course they would in no wise be spared either (John 15:20).

The reason Paul gloried in His weakness was simply due to the fact that Christ's power was made available and manifested in it. In fact God's power is made perfect in our weakness. This teaches us that, when we seem or look helpless, we are more inclined to relying fully on the strength and power of God;

“He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Most gladly therefore I will rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest on me” 2 Cor 12:9

To the Apostle, for Christ's power to continue to rest on him, he rather chose to boast of his infirmities. He thus, gloried in weakness, insults, hardships, persecutions, and difficulties, for when he is weak then is he really strong (2 Cor 12:9-10). Surprisingly, those deemed to be matured in our age at the least

detection of all these the Apostle has enumerated will fight very hard to be alleviated from them. The maturing believer will certainly boast of the things which show his weakness. The Apostles looked very harmless but were rather being persecuted. When Christ wanted to re-orient the minds and understanding of the apostles with regard to the one who is indeed great before the throne of grace, He did not hesitate to reveal to them the necessity of being like a child. If one wants to be first in the sight of God, then being a servant of all men is really indispensable;

“He sat down, and called the twelve; and he said to them, “If any man wants to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all.” Mark 9:35

We gather from this scripture that those who are matured or rather maturing make themselves servants of all men. Making yourself a servant implies that, it lies within your power to lord it over other people you feel you are greater than, but like Christ, you make yourself of no reputation;

“But emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men.” Phil 2:7

Furthermore, to be a servant of all is to avail yourself to serve all men you come into contact with, irrespective of their spiritual level or socio-economic standing. Meaning, the matured does not discriminate between persons, just as Christ is no respecter of

persons. Some who believe they are matured are mostly biased towards the rich and the influential. Will thou not know oh my brother that no matter ones standing in society, in as far as the fellow has been purchased by the blood of Christ, he or she is part of the body of Christ? Discriminating in the house of God, no matter which form it takes is tantamount to dividing the body of Christ. Those who have an understanding of being partakers of the divine nature of Christ are not oblivious of this revelation.

In looking at Paul's life, we observe that he was hard working and one who was greatly blessed by God. He however did not use the power given him by Christ to make gain for himself. Though he had the power to lavish himself with some of the material blessings God gave him, he rather chose to bless others with it. Thus, he appeared to be poor since he used his financial blessings to help other brethren in order for them to gain. He for that matter made up his mind not to abuse his power in the gospel;

“What then is my reward? That, when I preach the Good News, I may present the Good News of Christ without charge, so as not to abuse my authority in the Good News.” 1 Cor 9:18

Maturing believers by choice, make themselves “nobodies” in this world. They learn from the savior himself, who though was in the form of God, did not count it robbery to make himself equal with God, but rather made himself of no reputation. It is

worldliness to make yourself look like “somebody” in this sinking and dissolving world. A child of God needs not prove to the world anything, nor seek even their approval. According to God's standards if anyone wants to be wise in this world, then he has totally lost his bearing. We are rather to be foolish in the eyes of the world so that we can indeed be wise in the sight of God (1 Cor 3:18-20). Unfortunately most believers want to prove themselves in this world. Oh faithful child of God, will thou not shout on the roof tops and awaken these men who stupor due to the intoxication of the world;

“But if that servant says in his heart, 'My lord delays his coming,' and begins to beat the menservants and the maidservants, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken, then the lord of that servant will come in a day when he isn't expecting him, and in an hour that he doesn't know, and will cut him in two, and place his portion with the unfaithful.” Luke 12:45-46.

For we are not to be drunk with wine wherein we begin to go out of order, but to be filled (not intoxicated) with the spirit. To be intoxicated, which some claim they have attained is to abuse their power in the gospel, a state Paul Prayed himself out of.

CHAPTER 9

YOU ARE DESTINED FOR THESE MARKS

There are certain distinguishing marks of matured men or women which set them apart from those who are still babes. To begin with, we know from scripture that matured men seek the well-being of other believers and not what they feel they can gain out of them. Paul made it clear to the believers at Corinth that, fathers gather and lay in stock for their children and not the other way round. He therefore declared to them, he was ready to spend and be expended for their sake;

*"I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls.
If I love you more abundantly, am I loved the less?"
2 Cor 12:15*

In Africa for example, most "prosperity" preachers make gain out of the gospel. They do not seek the wellbeing of their members.

This is evident when you look at the gulf between them and most of their congregants socio-economically. These are certainly not matured. They are serving their belly since they mind earthly things. Minding earthly things consequently set them at variance with the Lord of host. It is our poverty of the knowledge of God which causes most of us to hail them as 'great men of God'. It is possible before God that, they are nowhere located in the lambs book of life, because of their fruits. Let is not judge men according to the flesh or by what we see. It is the judgment of God which is of significance here. We should therefore not fool ourselves because men hail us. Even Christ in His days reprimanded the lost rabbis for loving the praise of men rather than the praise of God. May God grace all of us to view things in the light of Him who sits on the throne. A grasp of the revelation that we are seated with Christ in the heavenly places (whereby we are supposed to seek those things above and not beneath) will help us discern things with eternities values in view. Paul, when he got to Thessalonica, informed brethren there that they did not only want to give them the gospel, but to add their own souls to the package. By this, he meant they worked with their own hands in order to first provide their own needs and that of those who were justifiably in need in the church there (I don't have a problem with a church supporting it's faithful workers). I however believe the spiritual import of what is being discussed here is what is most important. We should check our motives and drive in the preaching of the gospel. Pastor Tunde Bakare of the

statement that, “those who love people use money and those who love money use people”.

If a man is matured, he identifies with the weaknesses and challenges of other brethren. When believers are engrossed or entangled in one sin or the other, the matured is able to see how their souls are suffering and endeavors to help them out of it. He feels such deep love for them that he calls them back to order. We learn this from God Himself since He calls to order those sons whom He loves by even chastising them. Is it not therefore absurd that a man who claims to be matured cannot call a spade a spade in our age? When the church lived in sin, Paul was always hurt within;

“Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is caused to stumble, and I don't burn with indignation?”
2 Cor 11:29.

There were even times he wept for years simply because of the danger he foresaw would befall the souls he had won, owing to the proliferation of false preachers who will placate the conscience of sinners by declaring unto them peace, peace when in actual sense there is no peace between them and God.

Another mark of matured believers is, they operate by the meekness and the gentleness of Christ;

“Now I Paul, myself, entreat you by the humility and gentleness of Christ; I who in your presence am lowly among you, but being absent am of good courage toward you. Yes, I beg you that I may not, when present, show courage with the confidence with which I intend to be bold against some, who consider us to be walking according to the flesh.”
2 Cor 10:1-2.

This is to say, they learn of Christ and yearn to be Christlike. Please let us look around us and take stock of most of those we hail in our churches these days. Is there anything Christlike we can see in them? Do they have a burning desire to be like the one they claim to serve? Are they more like the world than Christ? Is over to you and I to answer in the light of available scriptures. Christ Himself told the disciples that, they should come and learn of Him, for He is meek and lowly in heart and they shall find rest for their souls;

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart; and you will find rest for your souls.” Matt 11:29.

Paul amplified this in his letter to the Ephesians that, we should learn from Christ (Eph 4:20-21).

Matured people excel in the grace of giving (2Cor 8:7). The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is the kind of grace Paul possessed to the point that he made himself poor in order for the church to become rich. This is the same grace, the churches of Macedonia had. He therefore wished the church at Corinth would also manifest this level of grace by giving even their poverty. This grace which is in the realm of Christ is that it makes one who though is rich, make himself poor in order to help others to gain or become rich. Professor Zacharias Tane Fomum explains it this way that, one goes out of his way to use the financial resources God has endowed him with to advance the course of the gospel. By this, men can become spiritually rich in Christ Jesus (2Cor 8:8-9, 16, 9:8-9).

Matured men live in total obedience to the word of God to the extent that, the way of the truth cannot be evil spoken off. No wonder the qualifications of elders or bishops as enshrined in the scriptures is very high. One major qualification of the bishop in the New Testament is, he must be blameless or irreproachable (1 Tim 3:2). The reason is, when the elder or bishop himself is under reproach, he lacks the moral right to call to order both in the church and the world, those who do wrong. Certainly one cannot tell the neighbor, let me remove the speck in your eye whereas there is a log in his says Christ (Luke 6:41-42). Against the backdrop of this, Paul made it clear to the church at Corinth that, they the leaders can only launch an assault on the kingdom of darkness when the obedience of the church is complete;

*“and being in readiness to avenge all disobedience,
when your obedience will be made full.” 2 Cor 10:6*

What the apostle means here is, when the lives of believers are questionable, there is no way the leaders of the church can command the people of the world to repent of their evil ways. Matured men are aware of this, and for this reason labour to ensure that purity is upheld in the house of the Lord in order to disarm the effects of sin in making them unable to call the world back to order. For us to effectively evangelize the world, we must first and foremost carry out some spiritual sanitation in the church before we can legitimately sanitize the world. Even for God to judge the world, He needs to first of all start the judgment right from His house;

“For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God. If it begins first with us, what will happen to those who don't obey the Good News of God?” 1 Peter 4:17

From the book of Acts, we are made to understand that, there was not only the manifestation of signs and wonders among the believers, but also the fear of God gripped them. It is God's ultimate desire that we do not experience only signs and wonders, but also fear and give him the due reverence by living holy lives through the obedience of the word. Solomon in Ecclesiastes said, the whole duty of man is to fear Him and obey His

commandments (Eccl 12:13). Men should not only be taught to reverence Him by loving and obeying Him, but to also recognize He is a consuming fire (Heb 12:29) as well as one who has terror. Paul and the other disciples seized not to warn people, knowing the terror of God (2 Cor 5:11). He is the Lord who can destroy both man's body and soul and to condemn him in the lake of fire. He is to be feared. Do not let any man deceive you. Christ Himself warned one of the churches in Asia that they should not allow any man to take away from them what they had received;

“I am coming quickly! Hold firmly that which you have, so that no one takes your crown.” Rev 3:11

Matured men see giving as a proof of godliness. It reveals the fact that we understand that (in the first place) is through the giving out of God's only begotten son that we were redeemed (2Cor 8:24). In giving, the matured is able to decipher between what is seed and bread (2Cor 9:10-12). From this scripture, the Apostle is making us realize, when God blesses us, we should first and foremost recognize that we are stewards. By stewards, matured people know the blessings of God are not ends in themselves but are a means to an end.

It is the way we use these “blessings” or resources that will guarantee our reward in the hereafter. The matured knows that when God endows him with financial resources, it comprises of both seed and bread. The latter is what he spends on his needs and

that of his family if any, and the former is what he sows in the life of people (by giving) in order to qualify himself for a harvest (more financial resources to be entrusted into his hand). That is why it is more blessed to give than to receive. Every serious farmer after every harvest, in the subsequent season sows more than the previous season. In the same vane, God gives us more, according to the Apostle so that in our subsequent giving, we can give more. Consequently we will then qualify once again to receive more from God so that after taking our bread, we will have more seeds to sow the next time. The cycle is to continue till even God brings us to the point of blessing our nation(s) selflessly.

CHAPTER 10

THERE IS WORK FOR YOU

“For though we walk in the flesh, we don't wage war according to the flesh; for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the throwing down of strongholds, throwing down imaginations and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ; and being in readiness to avenge all disobedience, when your obedience will be made full.” 2 Cor 10:3-6

It is expected of the matured that they lead the church in the defense of the truth. Strongholds here refer to concepts and arguments which run contrary to the gospel of Christ. Paul and the others therefore saw the need to contend earnestly for the faith amidst falsehood. They could not do this except by the power of

the spirit. The preaching of the truth is indeed spiritual warfare, which requires matured people to lead the battle with the support of the prayers of the saints. Paul with this understanding sought the prayers of the saints that God will give him utterance in order for him to speak boldly as he ought to. The truth certainly is not for babes and weaklings who recoil at the least pressure from the forces of darkness. Apollos mightily convinced the Jews by refuting their arguments through his repertoire of scriptures and the power of God. Scriptures testify of him as a man mighty in scriptures (Acts 18:24). Maturity in other words places a demand on us to study to show ourselves approved unto God first, who will not be ashamed of the gospel and rightly dividing the word of truth (which entails faithful preaching of the word of God). We are not supposed to interpret scriptures to suite our life style nor pacify the evil desires of men if we claim to be matured. There is no way, one will be controlled by people to preach to tickle their ears and still claim to be matured in the sight of God. One man of God once said, the duty of the preacher is to feed the sheep and not to entertain the goats. Another elsewhere made it clear that the preacher is to challenge the spirit of the age and not to swim along the tide. You and I know dead fishes often swim along the tide. Matured men challenge the status quo in evil times such as ours. Everyone is preaching 'prosperity' and you believe it is a message which sells and for that matter you will also preach prosperity. I humbly submit to you my brother that you confused. However, I do believe in true prosperity and not the gospel of greed which

multitudes call prosperity. Often I hear men say, due to hardships (financial) in our days, there is the need for the preaching of prosperity in order to alleviate poverty, thus, dealing with the branches and neglecting the roots. The problem (root) is not just money, but the knowledge of Christ. When one is given the right knowledge of Christ, you do not need to even use money to coerce them to follow Him. They will love Christ whether or not they have financial gains. Please remember that, the gospel of prosperity which many preachers feel easy to preach makes men follow Christ because of bread and not for who He is. In the end they make men enemies of God.

In Christ's ministry, multitudes followed Him simply because He was a multiplier of bread. He, knowing the motivation of their heart reprimanded them by revealing to them why they were really following Him. It was clear according to Him that, men followed Him because of the Bread they ate;

“Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly I tell you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves, and were filled.” John 6:26.

Nevertheless He advised that we should not labour for the food which perishes, but for that which endures unto eternal life;

“Don't work for the food which perishes, but for the food which remains to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For God the Father has sealed him.” John 6:27.

No wonder in our days most preachers are day in and day out channeling out 'believers' who have little regard for holiness. All they yearn for when they go to the house of God is to make financial gains. They later betray Christ in their daily walk for silver, leading to falling standards in the church and the society as a whole. Earlier, I made the point that the 'prosperity' most preachers are delivering in our days is the gospel of greed. I stand to be corrected if their preaching and idea of God prospering His children is not that of Prodigal living. God does not bless His children so they could live prodigally, but to establish His covenant (in our case and dispensation, the preaching of the gospel). Such preachers though they claim they have been blessed, cannot really boast of alleviating poverty more than what unbelieving Philanthropist have succeeded in doing. There is therefore the need for matured men who will stop these mouths and dispute such unapostolic doctrine.

Still on spiritual warfare, matured men know the value of the gifts of the spirit and the role it plays in bringing many to the saving knowledge of Christ. Gifts and for that matter the manifestation of signs and wonders carries with it the convincing power of the authenticity of the gospel. Over the years we have heard of

testimonies of how God used some of our fathers to manifest His glory, and still continues to do. Though it is an undeniable fact that God is still at work in His church through signs and wonders, the matured do not settle for what we are experiencing in our days. Thus, echoing the clarion call for the revival of Apostolic signs and wonders, paralleling the days of the apostles and moving on to higher manifestations of the power of God.

Personally, I believe there is more to the power of God than what is being displayed before our eyes. There is however hope that the glory of the later house shall be greater than the former. In the early church, a single individual like Philip could conquer the whole of Samaria for Christ as well as the towns and villages in Cecaeria;

“When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, and the eunuch didn't see him any more, for he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus. Passing through, he preached the Good News to all the cities, until he came to Caesarea.” Acts 8:39-40.

In His ministry, a “Bar Jesus” was dispossessed of his beggarly powers and consequently ended this man’s career in the regions of Samaria. Clearly, scripture educates us that even the disciples believed in the Lord after He turned water into wine at Cana of Galilee;

"This beginning of his signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him." John 2:11.

Thus, underscoring the indispensability of the manifestation of God's power in demolishing unbelief to some extent. At one time Christ even said the people will not believe except they saw signs and wonders;

"Jesus therefore said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders, you will in no way believe." John 4:48

Elijah in His days brought the house of Israel on their knees in submission to the Lordship of the Lord on Mount Carmel when he called down fire from heaven. By the manifestation of the glory of God through Elijah who knew the God of heaven, the prophets of Baal who had hitherto seduced the house of Israel to worship Baal were subsequently annihilated. In effect he spiritually sanitized Israel of false worship. In our days, false prophets and magicians have infiltrated our environment at an alarming rate due to the slumber of the church. They feel so free without any opposition to advertise themselves in the open, defying the armies of the Lord. There is therefore a course for men of faith to arise one more time.

Paul brought the gentiles into obedience by mighty signs and wonders. He made this known in his letter to the church at Rome.

Paul, a matured believer saw the need for the manifestation of the power of God for converting many men to the truth;

“For I will not dare to speak of any things except those which Christ worked through me, for the obedience of the Gentiles, by word and deed, in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of God's Spirit; so that from Jerusalem, and around as far as to Illyricum, I have fully preached the Good News of Christ” Rom 15:18-19.

It is recorded in scripture that God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul to the extent that, aprons were brought into contact with his body and later used in delivering those who were demonically oppressed (Acts 19:11-12).

In spiritual warfare, matured men and women do not rely merely on the manifestation of God's power via gifts but also on the fruit they manifest. The fruit of the spirit matured people manifest carry the power to convert unbelievers. According to Peter, Christian women are expected to win over their unbelieving husbands by their life style;

“In like manner, wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; so that, even if any don't obey the Word, they may be won by the behavior of their wives without a word” 1 Peter 3:1.

Titus however adds that our lives should be attractive in order to convert men to Christ (Titus 2:10).

LESSONS FROM THE PARABLE OF TALENTS

“For it is like a man, going into another country, who called his own servants, and entrusted his goods to them. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one; to each according to his own ability. Then he went on his journey. Immediately he who received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. In like manner he also who got the two gained another two. But he who received the one went away and dug in the earth, and hid his lord's money. Now after a long time the lord of those servants came, and reconciled accounts with them.” Matt 25:14-19

One of the secrets of maturing believers is embedded in the above parable. From this parable, it is noticeable that those who made more talents, upon receipt of their talents immediately put them to use. There is no way one will make a loss when he or she immediately put to use what God has taught him or her. All fears with regards to whether we will profit or not when we obey God should be vanquished in the light of the above parable. The third servant at the other end gave fear as his justification for not

CHAPTER 11

WISDOM FOR THE PERFECT

There is a kind and level of wisdom which can be grasped by men who are capable of excavating it within the depth of faith as they see beyond the natural. It isn't every one who can grasp this truth, but only the perfect (matured) who attain to this level of wisdom.

This is the kind of level Paul attained. Most often than not, a majority of the children of God pride themselves in the things they enjoyed or are enjoying because of their faith in Christ. Personally I do not have a problem with that. However, why should we be so much content with this level of life? This level is the hallmark of babes and we need to grow out of it. We need to join the row of the matured by coming to an understanding of the benefits sufferings accrue to the believer and others whose destinies are linked to his. It may sound unattractive to practice

and that is why Paul said we speak this kind of wisdom among the matured;

“We speak wisdom, however, among those who are full grown; yet a wisdom not of this world, nor of the rulers of this world, who are coming to nothing. But we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the wisdom that has been hidden, which God foreordained before the worlds for our glory” 1 Cor 2:6-7

When we mature and come to the understanding of what suffering does for us and others, we will not pride ourselves in what we enjoy for the sake of Christ but rather what we suffer for His sake. Naturally you will observe that it is the adult who makes sacrifices for the child. The child is only interested in pleasure rather than pain. Do you recognize that the elderly in our society normally take pride in recounting the sought of things they have gone through in life for the sake of the young ones? Why not also understand this truth from the spiritual perspective?

As for Paul, when others were boasting about what they feel they were enjoying or had to enjoy as believers, he rather chose to pride himself in the life of Christ and His crucifixion (1 Cor 2:1-2). By this, he meant he wanted to be identified with the life and suffering of Christ, for he was not ashamed of the life of Christ. How many of us are really ready to imitate the life of Christ. If we truly want to be identified with Christ, then we need

to have His mind set, growing into His very likeness.

The things we pass through in life most often tend to toughen us and bring out the best in us. Scripture makes us notice, Christ Himself was made perfect by the things He suffered (Hebrews 2:9-18). If we are to imitate him, then we should not try to always escape suffering or pray that it be waved off our lives. From the above scripture its been made known that Christ tasted death for all of us in order to qualify Him to be a faithful high priest;

“Therefore he was obligated in all things to be made like his brothers, that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people. For in that he himself has suffered being tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.” Heb 2:17-18

You will bear witness that, most of the things we have ever gone through or suffered in life have in one way or the other served as a raw material in helping others who find themselves in the same or similar situation. Do we then say, what we ever suffered for Christ isn't a blessing? Certainly not. Paul tried as much as possible to identify himself with all manner of people in a bid to help them. He put it this way that, he became all things unto all men so that he might by all means save some;

“To the weak I became as weak, that I might gain the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some.” 1 Cor 9:22.

It appears the level to which one suffers in life is directly proportional to the number of people one is able to help in similar circumstances.

CHAPTER 12

LAYING A FOUNDATION FOR ETERNITY

The way we live our lives here on earth will determine where we will spend eternity. In fact we are laying a foundation for ourselves in eternity based on how we live our lives presently. If we live in disobedience then we have hell's mouth being opened wide to welcome us. Conversely, when we live in obedience to God's word, then heaven will be our eternal abode.

Paul in his first letter to Timothy makes us recognize that, our life here is a foundation for the age to come, and thus, there is a need for us to lay a good foundation for our lives in eternity;

“laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold of eternal life.” 1 Tim 6:19.

From this scripture it is clear that, one of the surest ways by which we can lay a good foundation for ourselves in heaven is by sharing our wealth and riches with those who are financially disadvantaged.

Christ declared He is the way, the truth and the life. If there is any way we want to take, let us go His way. If we want the truth, He is the truth, and if there is any quality and meaningful life we want to live, then we need to copy His lifestyle. He taught that we should store our treasures in heaven by way of liberally distributing our wealth among those who are needy (Matt 6:20). Since this earth will be eventually dissolved together with the elements thereof, why then concentrate on building empires here on earth. The wise will definitely pay heed to the voice of the chief shepherd by sharing his or her riches with others which is the way to depositing our riches in heaven whereby a good foundation is laid for our lives.

ARE YOU PREPARED FOR CHRIST'S SECOND COMING?

Please note that...

The first Adam disobeyed God and because of his disobedience sin entered the human race, resulting in the spiritual death and separation of man from God; “Therefore, as sin entered into the world through one man, and death through sin; and so death passed to all men, because all sinned...So then as through one trespass, all men were condemned; even so through one act of righteousness, all men were justified to life.” Romans 5:12-13, 18.

The last Adam (Jesus Christ) obeyed God in order to take away sin from the human race; “But God commends his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8.

Your part of the arrangement is to receive the grace or free gift of God's salvation by faith (Romans 4:16-17).

You must understand that faith without works is dead, so God expects you to obey and receive this free gift (but costly) salvation with your free will;

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become God's children, to those who believe in his name: who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." John 1:12-13.

The most important decision you have to make now is to be born again (John 3:1-8). Being born again is to repent of your sins and to submit yourself to be baptized by immersion as well as receive the Holy Spirit; "Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Acts 2:38.

The grace of God is not a license for you to sin, but rather to receive strength to live in obedience to God's word (Titus 2:11-14).

You therefore have to (as a matter of necessity), live a holy life and walk as Christ did, and not to live in hypocrisy; "However God's firm foundation stands, having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are his, and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness." 2 Timothy 2:19. "Everyone who has this hope set on him purifies himself, even as he is pure." 1 John 3:3.

If you walk in the light of the above scriptures and make 2 Peter 1:2-10 your guiding principle, you will never live a

defeated Christian life, thereby ensuring that you be found in Christ even at His glorious appearing.

However I caution that you beware of people who preach Another Gospel, Another Jesus and Another Spirit as in line with 2 Corinthians 11:1-4.

For more information, please contact us via the following address:

Revealed Oracles of God
P. O. Box WY 423, Kwabenya
Accra, Ghana-West Africa.
+233 242 118 395 /+233 233 118 400 /
+233 233 118 401
revealedoracles@yahoo.com

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